

## Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* at South Georgia

by Keith Reid

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On 20 January 1997 at 18.45 (local time) an unusual gull was seen flying around Freshwater Bay, Bird Island (54°01'S, 38°03'W). When first noticed the bird was flying over the beach, after which it landed briefly on the shore before flying off to the southeast and out of sight. The initial impression was of a small buoyant gull, compared to the resident Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*, recalling Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, with noticeable long dark wings and a distinct dark marking on the head.

It was watched for approximately 5 minutes in good light through 7 × 42 binoculars at a range down to 20 m and the following description taken. Head—forehead, lores, chin and throat white; crown, nape and ear-coverts dark, forming half hood extending to just in front of eye. Eye dark with distinct pale upper and lower eye crescents. Bill dark and approximately equal in length to the loral distance. Upperparts—mantle and wing coverts dark grey, outer primaries darker and lacking pale mirrors. Inner primaries and secondaries with pale tips forming whitish trailing edge contrasting with dark secondary bar and outer primaries. Tail white with distinct black sub-terminal band. Underparts—white.

In examining the possible species involved it is apparent that this bird belonged to one of the group of small gulls which have dark head markings in adult plumage. Within this group three species which regularly occur in South America—Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*, Andean Gull *L. serranus* and Grey-headed Gull *L. cirrocephalus*—can all be ruled out as they have much paler grey mantle and wing-coverts which form a very characteristic wing pattern (Harrison 1983), different from the bird in question. This leaves Laughing Gull *L. atricilla* and Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan*, both of which have a much darker grey base colour across the wings and mantle. Although the Laughing Gull shows a distinct dark subterminal tail band in first winter plumage it has generally grey, not white, underparts (Grant 1982). In addition the Laughing Gull's bill is longer than the loral length, often appearing "heavy and drooping" (Grant 1982). Franklin's Gull has a distinctive dark half hood with white eye-crescents in all plumages and first winter birds show a distinct dark subterminal tail band (Grant 1982). From this combination of plumage and structural characters the bird was identified as a first winter Franklin's Gull.

Other than Kelp Gull, which is a common resident, Dolphin Gull *L. scoresbii* is the only other gull species confirmed on the South Georgia list (Prince & Croxall 1996). A single record of Brown-hooded Gull was considered unacceptable by Bourne (1988) as the description published (Delany *et al.* 1988) could apply to a second winter Franklin's Gull. Although Brown-hooded Gulls breed in southern South America,

including the Falkland Islands, they disperse north after breeding (Harrison 1983). Franklin's Gull, however, nests mainly on inshore marshes in the prairies of North America and migrates south to winter along the Pacific coast of South America as far south as Valdivia, Chile (Harrison 1983). The highly migratory nature of this species is illustrated by previous records in the South Atlantic, Indian Ocean and Australia (Higgins & Davies 1996). In the South Atlantic there are single records from Tristan da Cunha in February 1956 (Swales & Murphy 1965) and the Falkland Islands, the South Orkney Islands and in the Scotia Sea (summarised in Prince & Croxall 1996). Watson (1975) refers to a single bird reported from Gough Island in February 1956, citing Swales & Murphy (1965), and records from both Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha are reported in the review of records by Higgins & Davies (1996). Clearly both references relate to the single bird on Tristan da Cunha, and there do not appear to be any authentic published records from Gough Island.

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## The date of publication of Montin's description of *Lagopus mutus*

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The original description of the Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus* was published by Lars Montin in Vol. 1 of *Physiographiska Sällskapet's Handlingar*